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SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, NOVEMBER 13-20: IRAQI  
RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE IN CAIRO

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Summary  
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1. In contrast to the Egyptian media's previous distancing itself from coverage of Iraqi developments, this week's Arab League-organized Iraqi reconciliation conference received remarkably thorough coverage. Pro-government papers endorsed the conference warmly, while independent papers treated it matter-of-factly and reported on the disagreements among the Iraqi participants. Opposition papers took due note of the conference, but in the main reserved the brunt of their coverage for the run-off elections for the people's assembly. End summary.

2. Headlines in pro-government newspapers on November 20 blared: "President Mubarak inaugurates the Iraq conciliation conference held at the Arab League" (Al-Ahram, circulation: 750,000). "Mubarak: National reconciliation ensures gradual ending of foreign presence in Iraq" (Akhbar, circulation: 780,000). "Mubarak: Iraq's unity is the path to success" (Al-Gomhouriya, circulation: 200,000). "Mubarak: Iraq's unity and people are above all considerations" (Rose Al-Youssef magazine, circulation: 50,000). Independent print media headlines were slightly less ebullient: "Iraqis set off on the road to reconciliation in Cairo" (Nahdat Masr, circulation: 20,000); "Differences among Iraqi parties threatens Cairo meeting" (Al-Ahrar, circulation: 20,000). Opposition newspapers reported on the conference but only on tangential issues, as they were preoccupied with covering the latest round of parliamentary elections.

3. Coverage: Pro-government papers Al-Ahram, Al-Akhbar, and Al-Gomhouriya, on November 20, gave the conference full coverage and published the entire transcripts of the speeches of President Mubarak, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Arab League Secretary General Amr Mousa. A walk-out of the 24-member delegation of the Unified Iraqi Coalition led by Dr. Hamam Baqer Abdul-Majeed Hamoodi, protesting statements made by Menas Ibrahim Al-Yousefi, who had asserted that the Iraqi constitution was largely drafted by the United States and that the members of the current Iraqi government had come to power through the occupation forces, received prominent coverage, as did Amr Mousa's admonition to the session to "act in a responsible manner." Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Jaafari's warning about the return of the Baath being a "red line" and the Chairman of the Muslim Scholars Board calling for a timetable for withdrawal of occupation forces were highlighted in pro-government Rose El-Youssef magazine.

4. Commentaries: In Al-Ahram, on November 20, the Iraqi writer Dawood El-Farhan wrote that the conference should have focused on building an Iraqi-Iraqi dialogue to stop the bloodshed first, and that all other political issues could be settled through continuing dialogue. Commentator Emad Galal wrote in the same paper that despite clear differences at the opening session, Iraqis should find common ground for reconciliation, including a timetable for withdrawal of foreign forces; a position on the role of the Baath and the armed militias; and the problem of terrorists. Former editor of Al-Ahram and highly respected commentator, Ibrahim Nafie, wrote in Al-Ahram that Egypt and the Arab League have given maximum support to the conference and that it is now the responsibility of the Iraqis to have the courage to reach a common understanding. In Al-Akhbar newspaper, columnist Badr El-Din Adham welcomed the fact that it was the Arab League that had convened the conference saying that it is the "House of all the Arabs," and that despite differences of opinion, the meeting was a first step toward reconciliation. Highly respected columnist and former editor of Al-Akhbar newspaper Galal Duweidar criticized recent statements by Secretary Rice in which she stressed that the United States

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is offering aid to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure, saying it would be better to announce a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq. Editor in Chief of the opposition paper Al-Wafd (circulation: 180,000), Abbas Tarabily, welcomed the conference and wished it success, but noted that Ahmed Chalabi "America's man in the early days of the American occupation of Iraq" was not present. He also noted that

the conference coincided with demands by the American Congress to withdraw American forces from Iraq. In Al-Osboa magazine (circulation: 50,000), known for its harshly anti-U.S. line, writer Mahmoud Tamimi, criticized the conference saying that the main focus should have been on solving the "core" problem in Iraq, which is the "criminal American occupation."

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